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## THE SEARCH FOR THE PROPHETS.

THERE is no part of the Old Testament that has for us greater interest than the prophetic literature. In its impassioned poetic passages, in its lofty ethical thought and in its profound interest in life, it is far superior to any other type of literature which we find in the Hebrew canon. This is but saying that the greatest minds in Israel expressed themselves as spokesmen or interpreters of Yahveh in oracular literature, the highest thought was molded into prophetic forms of expression. For this reason the question, who wrote this literature? who were the men who cast their thought into oracular molds? is an important critical question to the student of Hebrew life. The question has the greater significance, it is worthy of note, because the prophetic literature is so extensive. One fourth of the Old Testament canon consists of prophetic books and pieces. Three of these books are individually equivalent to a duodecimo of one hundred and fifty pages. This prophetic literature is indeed, for an ancient literature, of vast dimensions.

It has commonly been supposed that the writing prophets are known to us through the titles which the various books and prophetic pieces bear and through occasional personal allusions in these writings. There has been little disposition to question these titles and allusions; especially as they have been thought to be supported, measurably at least, by references to these prophets in the historical books; but such references are so few and so suspicious as to their character that the search for the men themselves becomes to him who prosecutes it very perplexing. Apparently too much has been taken for granted. It has been assumed that just as we

know certain Greek tragedies as the work of an Æschylus, and certain as the work of a Sophocles, and certain others as the work of an Euripides, all prominent in Greek life; so we know the various prophetic books and pieces of the Old Testament as the work of the men whose names they bear, which men indubitably appear in the historical annals of Israel. Such, as a careful critical study reveals, is not the case.

The Greek tragic poets find a large place in the life and historical annals of the Greeks of the fifth century before Christ. Æschylus is known to have borne an honorable part in keeping the Persians in the Marshes of Marathon and to have aided later in the overthrow of Xerxes at Salamis. It has been said of him that he was honored by his countrymen as a patriot rather than as a poet, though as such for a generation he was awarded the prize for superiority in the drama. Sophocles is known to have led as a youth the chorus which danced and sang around the trophy in celebration of the battle of Salamis and to have served as a colleague of Pericles in the Samnian war. The statement of his biographer that he bore his full share of the civic burdens of his people and that he served frequently in foreign embassies, has been regarded an exaggeration. There can, however, be no question but that as a poet for three decades he was prominently before his people and kept in close touch with the great movements of his time. Euripides had less fondness for public life; but his work as a dramatist kept him before the people for half a century while his unhappy family life became notorious. Though he in his old age expatriated himself, it is said that when the news of his death reached Athens the whole city was thrown into mourning. The same is not true, so far as we can discover, of the writers of the Hebrew prophetic literature. They do not appear in the historical annals of their supposed time.

To him who is interested in the life and thought of Israel there is no more fascinating diversion than the search for the literary prophets. It is upon this still-hunt that I purpose to take my readers. My reasons for so doing will appear later. It is enough at this point to remark that our interest in the ethical thought of the

past—and nowhere is there to be found prior to Jesus's time loftier ethical thought—leads us to desire to place this thought where it belongs, that we may appreciate it and grasp its significance to Israel and to the world. If we date some of these prophets two or three centuries too early, we must think of them as belaboring their people with messages which they could not understand, and which, because they were untimely, accomplished nothing. If, on the other hand, we date these writings where they belong, we may be able to determine what their authors accomplished as the great ethical teachers of their time. This will remain true though we may find that these books and pieces were written by men who belonged to a literary school and did not exercise orally the functions of prophets.

In our search for prophets who are thought to have given utterance to oracles which were afterwards written out fully, or in part, we confine our attention to the books of the so-called major and minor prophets. The supposed authors of these only are known as literary prophets; and it is for traces of the literary prophets we are looking. We cannot forbear noticing at the outset that there are credible reasons for believing that there were prophets, men who professed to speak for Yahveh in ancient times among the early Hebrews, just as among other peoples there were men who stood forth as prophets and professed to speak for the gods of their people. Scholars have been wont to regard suspiciously the words put in the mouth of Nathan in 2 Samuel (see vii. 2 ff.; xii. 1 ff.); but we may take the allusions to him in 1 Kings (i. 8 ff.) as revealing the existence of an actual prophet who was a member of David's household. His functions may have been few and simple; and he may have been wholly subservient to his royal master, still it is reasonable to suppose that David had some such man who professed to be able to ascertain the will of Yahveh and to speak for him.

There are numerous allusions in the history of the kings of Judah and Israel to such a class of men. Ahijah the Shilonite who is said to have encouraged Jeroboam appears to have been such a one (1 Kings xi. 29 ff.); though the Deuteronomists spoil the

simple story told of him by their expansion (see vss. 32 ff.). It is not unreasonable to suppose that Elijah and Elisha, despite all the legends which gathered about their names, were men who figured prominently in certain directions in the life of Israel, though the latter seems to have been more inclined than the former to play the part of a courtier. We are told that Jonah, son of Amittai, served at the court of Jeroboam II, and that he encouraged him in his imperialistic policy (2 Kings xiv. 25). Such, not to mention others, were the prophets of Israel and Judah. They were men of action, rather than men of letters. There is nothing to lead us to suppose that they ever committed such petty oracles as they uttered to writing, if, indeed, they were possessed of the art. Our search is not for such men; but for traces of the men who are named as the great actors of the prophetic literature, who are said to have uttered the great oracles which were grouped about their names. Can we discover in the actual history of those times such men as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah? For these men we are to search. If they were actual personages, and, especially, were the great voices and actors of their time, then we should expect to find many traces of them in the annals of those old days.

We have to confess at the outset that we do find, as, indeed, we have seen, mention of a certain Jonah ben Amittai; but we hasten to remark that this man who figures in the book of Jonah, as scholars have long since noted, was imaginatively taken by the late writer of the book as his supposed prophetic actor. Some four or five hundred years must have separated the age of the prophet who frequented the court of Jeroboam II from the time when this delightful little evangel was written. Here, then, we have, admittedly, a late piece of literature, dated back and fictitiously assigned to a prophet of the eighth century. A study of the phenomena which this book presents raises in our minds the question whether this is the only pseudepigraphic prophetic piece in the Old Testament. It would be strange if this were the only one, so strange that we note with interest the fact that other prophetic books have been found perplexing, that scholars have been wont, for example, to question whether Malachi was an actual prophet, or whether

the name was that of the supposititious prophet of the writer who had given Israel this little book that is universally recognized as late. It is not matter for wonder that they should have done so, for the name means "my messenger." It is just such a name as we may conceive a writer who wished to put his thought in prophetic form might have taken. Of this Malachi there is no trace in the history. "Obadiah" (servant of Yah, or Yahveh), was a common name among the Hebrews, but of a prophet of this name the history gives us no hint. The oracle against Edom which forms the burden of the little prophetic piece, which is ascribed to him, might have been published near the Maccabean age; for we know it was not until the time of Judas that the Edomites, who had been crowded by the Nabateans up into southern Judea in early exilic days, were subjugated (1 Maccabees v. 3 ff., 65). The oracle is really an expansion of one which occurs in Jeremiah (xlix. 7 ff.). As for the name, here again we have just such a name as a late writer might have taken if he wished to conceive of an oracular prophet as uttering what he had written.

Nowhere in the historical books do we come upon prophets known as Nahum and Habakkuk. Nahum (consolation) is a fit title for the supposed prophet of the impassioned oracle which, Otto von Happel in his recent handbook thereon concludes, must have been late, thus agreeing substantially with my unpublished notes of two or three years ago. There can be no question but that the allusions to the Assyrians are veiled allusions to the Greeks or the Syrians, while Nineveh stands for some city of the third or second century B. C. As surely are the references to the Chaldeans in Habakkuk veiled allusions to later peoples.

Of a prophet known as "Zephaniah," who appears as the preacher in the little prophetic book which is said to be his, there is no mention in the history. The manifest attempt to give this supposed prophet a royal pedigree in the title renders the existence of an actual prophet of this name all the more doubtful. Of Hosea, Amos, and Joel there is not the shadow of a trace in the history of Israel. This is, as scholars have confessed, remarkable. Amos, as the herdsman of Tekoah, who is thought to have gone north

as a Judean prophet and roared, though ineffectually, at the old sanctuary of Bethel, has been declared to be "one of the most marvelous and incomprehensible figures in the history of the human mind." So incomprehensible has he seemed that we can understand why one scholar has been moved to remark that Amos could not have gone north to the Bethel of which we read in North Israel, but must have gone rather to some house of God or local shrine of that name in Judea. Hosea is thought, as the title of the book named as his intimates, to have labored as a prophet in the north for half a century, though no trace of him is to be found. The book of Joel comes before us as a problem quite as perplexing. It is significant that the book of Amos which is a burden, a message of doom to Israel and Judah and neighboring peoples, with but a word of bright promise and assurance at the end thereof which has been supposed to be an appendix by another hand, has for its title "Amos" (a burden), a name which occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament. While "Hosea" and "Joel" are common Israelitish names, it is easy to see why they may have been taken by late writers as names of the authors of their prophetic pieces.

More astounding still is the fact that Ezekiel, who is supposed to have been the great prophet of the early exilic days, is mentioned nowhere in the Old Testament outside the book which bears this name. Even in the book the name appears but twice. On the very reasonable supposition that the book is a late pseudepigraphic work whose author purposely dated it back several centuries, we may explain the failure to speak of such a one as Ezekiel in the historical annals, not otherwise. We are likely to find that Zunc and Seinecke, as they labored long ago in this field, were the pioneers of a more intelligent conception than were their opponents.

Micah the Moreshite is named as the prophet of one of the short prophetic books. Though unmentioned in the history, this supposed prophet is quoted by name in Jeremiah (xxvi. 18). This has little evidential value without Jeremiah as a prophet actually played an important part in the life of Judah in the days of Josiah and later.

Haggai and Zechariah who are named as the prophets who gave

utterance to the oracles of two of the minor prophetic books are mentioned in Ezra (v. 1; vi. 14); but if we are to conclude with one of our modern scholars that Ezra was, as he appears in Hebrew literature, a creation of the late priestly school and that the book which bears his name was largely, if not wholly, imaginative, we must admit that the mention of such prophets in the late literature counts for little. In some curious ways the book of Ezra and these two prophetic books are interlinked. It is possible that both Haggai and proto-Zechariah were written to bolster the fictitious priestly story of the return and restoration which we find in Ezra. We can safely assert that in the actual history of Israel no such prophet appears.

Two prophetic books remain to be considered, two of the longest and most important to the student of this part of the Old Testament literature, Jeremiah and Isaiah. There is probably no one of the literary prophets who has puzzled scholars more than has Jeremiah. According to the book which bears his name he must have been the most important personage in the last half century of Judean life prior to the exile. In the days of Josiah and for several decades thereafter he is said to have figured prominently as the spokesman of Yahveh. He is pictured as throwing himself into the civil affairs of his time with a zeal which knew no abatement and with a heroism which was unquestioned. Opposed, yet never disheartened, thwarted and made to suffer terribly, yet never crushed by adversity, he made his influence powerfully felt in a lost cause. Recognizing the inevitableness of the spread of Chaldean power he unweariedly endeavored to save from utter ruin the Judean state and to turn the thoughts of his people to the loftier ethical ideals for which they might live as dreams of material advancement and splendor faded. Such he appears to have been, according to the writings and the oracles incorporated therewith, attributed to him; yet when we come to search for him in the history of his time we discover not the slightest trace. This, as Dr. MacCurdy and others have noted, is marvelous and manifestly inexplicable.

It must of course be admitted that the references to Jeremiah in the late priestly literature (2 Chron. xxxv. 25; xxxvi. 12, 21, 22;



Ezra i. 1) are without critical value, as is the mention of the name in Daniel (ix. 2), a Maccabean book. Such allusions were made long after, though perhaps not more than a century after, the writer of Jeremiah had published his work and it had been accepted as an ancient prophetic book. When we call to mind the fact that some three or four centuries intervened between the date usually assigned this supposed prophet and the date of the first priestly mention of him we can easily see how little warrant we have for assuming that there was an actual personage of that name in Josiah's day. We have also to take into account the fact that the writings promulgated as Jeremiah's are thoroughly saturated with Deuteronomy and must in consequence have been written some considerable time subsequent thereto. If the Deuteronomists were post-exilic, as we shall have to conclude they were, then the book of Jeremiah must be placed somewhere between 400 and 250 B. C., or even later.

In turning to Isaiah, we are interested to notice that much of the book has long been thought to be the work of an unknown exilic writer who for convenience is called Deutero-Isaiah; even much of what was once thought to belong to the original, or proto-Isaiah, is now, for reasons which appear to be conclusive, assigned to the second Isaiah, or some later prophet. To some, as to Canon Cheyne (see *Isaiah*, *S. B. O. T.*), but little is left of the work of the first Isaiah, the equivalent of about fourteen chapters in all. The mention of Isaiah in the titles of chapters i and ii has no evidential value, for either we must consider the titles late, or must, and more reasonably, with certain advanced scholars, regard these chapters as a part of the work of Deutero-Isaiah, and therefore late. Similarly the mention of Isaiah in xiii. 1, the title of an admittedly late oracle against Babylon is equally valueless. Let no one remind us of the Assyrian chapters (xxxvi-xxxix) in which the name of this supposed prophet occurs several times, for these are undeniably late, as Dr. Cheyne has conclusively shown. To discredit these chapters as the work of an original Isaiah is to throw out 2 Kings xix, xx as evidence that there was such a person in the days of King Hezekiah. The mention of Isaiah in the Berodach-

baladan episode (2 Kings xx. 12-19; Isa. xxxix) may form a possible exception, though it is not wholly free from suspicion. It certainly is somewhat after the character of the accredited stories of the old prophets of action, unlikely as it is that such a prophet bore such a suggestive name as "Isaiah."

There remain only the references to the supposed prophet in chapters vii and xx. The passages in which these allusions to Isaiah occur are quite different from anything else which is found in this book, absurd and apparently incredible as they are. In the first passage we are told that Isaiah at the command of Yahveh went forth to meet King Ahaz with his son whom he had strangely named "a remnant shall return," and encouraged him with fitting words. We are expected to believe that Isaiah, about a century and a half before Jerusalem fell and two or three centuries before the pious Zionists began to straggle back from foreign ports, by this wondrously suggestive symbolic name thus designated his son. The story is palpably absurd: it puts too great a strain upon our credulity. And a symbolic name may have been given by a late writer to a son of his supposed prophet very naturally, for then did he and others cherish the hope of a return and of a resurrection of the old Hebrew state, then and not until then.

Quite as incredible is the allusion to Isaiah in chapter xx. According to this passage Isaiah is said to have gone naked and barefoot about Jerusalem for three years as a sign and warning against Egypt, lower and upper (Mizraim and Ethiopia), thus insinuating to his friends and neighbors who were said to be looking to Egypt for help, that the people of that land were to be led abroad as captives, and that dependence on them was therefore vain. Something akin to this, the old prophets were ever doing; but it is hardly conceivable that the writer is here describing an actual occurrence.

We are thus forced to conclude that neither in the historical books nor in this great prophetic book do we come upon convincing evidence of the existence of such a one as Isaiah. It is significant that the very name "Isaiah" is symbolic, and is strongly characteristic of the oracles throughout. It is the salvation or deliverance of Yahveh which is the theme of the book; and "Isaiah" means

"salvation or deliverance of Yah, or Yahveh." Here, moreover, as in the case of other supposed literary prophets the name of the supposed father of the prophet is of one who appears nowhere in the history. Besides "Amos" means "strength," or "strong one." Even if our search in this instance be thought to bring to light an actual prophet of the olden time we are not to think of him as having anything to do with the oracles here brought together. We may regard them as late writings thrust back imaginatively into the earlier time by their author or authors in a way thoroughly characteristic of the Hebrews.

We shall have to admit that our search for the literary prophets of Israel has not brought such men to light. Nowhere do we find traces of such men. Though they are pictured in their supposed writings as figuring prominently in the life of Israel from the close or middle of the eighth century on for five hundred years; we cannot in the chronicles of the people put our hands on them: always and everywhere they elude us. Need we wonder that scholars who have spent much of their time in this quest in their study of the prophetic literature should have drawn back amazed and perplexed?

I ask no one to accept my conclusions; but I cannot forbear saying that I see but one reasonable explanation of this most perplexing problem, it is that in common with most of the other Old Testament literature the prophetic is pseudepigraphic and as such is late. Such writings must be accounted for. There is in the Old Testament nothing finer, nothing more uplifting from both the poetic and ethical point of view than large sections of the prophets. For good reasons the great men of the post-exilic time chose to publish anonymously or pseudonymously their prophetic thought. Taking up the work and following on after the Deuteronomic school, the school which for convenience we call the prophetic, chose to work out of sight, giving an air of mystery to their pieces as they were sent forth; as the publication of Deuteronomy itself had been compassed about with mystery, as a work attributed to Moses, the reputed discovery of which in the time of Josiah was said to have occasioned a great and drastic reformation.

If my findings as to the Deuteronomists are accepted there need

be no question as to the prophetic writers that cannot be reasonably explained. If we can conceive of pious Zionists as they straggled back from foreign ports with their nobler conception of Yahveh and their purer ethics in their endeavor to build up a new Israel on the ruins of the old, labored as Deuteronomic monotheists, redacting after their peculiar manner the old chronicles of their people and promulgating Deuteronomy as a recapitulation and enlargement of the Book of the Covenant, as passing over into the prophetic school which was further reinforced by other returning Zionists, we have a conception of the prophetic literature which is most inspiring as it is withal most reasonable. Already the discovery of the fact that Deutero-Isaiah is post-exilic and late, that the burden of its matchless oracles has to do with the *golah*, the Jews who returned from Babylonia and other distant parts, has rendered it a most fascinating book. A more careful examination of the prophets reveals the fact that large portions of them are of the same general character as Deutero-Isaiah, that whenever the *golah* is mentioned in the prophets it is with radiant optimism. To think of the prophetic literature as late and to discover how the writers of this literature turned to the Zionists to whom they undoubtedly themselves belonged is to find how needless it is to mutilate the prophetic writings and assign to late writers all portions and fragments which are hopeful and optimistic.

We cannot of course be sure of the integrity of any one prophetic book; though we may seriously doubt if it be any such patchwork as some find such books as Amos and Isaiah to have been. Still there is nothing inherently incredible in the thought, if these different books are late, that they are for the most part the work of men who gave their books an individuality and unity that may be apparent to us; while certain of the books may be the work of two or more writers. In a few instances a prophetic writer may have produced more than one prophetic piece or may have had a hand in the composition of two or more of the larger books. There are chapters of Jeremiah and Ezekiel that may have come from the hand of the writers of the more optimistic portions of Isaiah. It is thus that a prophetic school sends forth its work. Once grant

that the prophetic literature of Israel is the pseudepigraphic and late work of such a school and we have to admit that the question of the authorship of any individual book or piece is of no particular moment as it certainly is as much beyond our power to determine as the authorship of a psalm. It is significant that the titles of so many of these prophetic books have been regarded by certain of our great critical scholars as spurious. Taken as they stand they are supposed to be inexplicable. By looking upon the prophetic writings, as I have here suggested we must, we may let the titles stand as the efforts of their late writers to give an imaginative setting for their work in earlier centuries.

EDWARD DAY.

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